

EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN THROUGH ETHICAL AND SUSTAINABLE FASHION

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ABSTRACT

Women's empowerment through ethical and sustainable fashion is a powerful amalgamation that can drive positive change in society, the environment, and women's lives across the globe. Sustainable fashion refers to ethically and environmentally conscious production, consumption, and disposal of clothing and accessories. When women are involved in this movement, it amplifies the impact and creates opportunities for empowerment on multiple levels. Women empowerment can be fostered through economic empowerment, wherein sustainable fashion can provide economic opportunities for women by promoting fair trade practices and supporting ethical fashion brands. The fashion and heritage craft industries also underwent significant changes. They have become more consumer-oriented rather than profit-oriented. They play their roles in women's lives by boosting their confidence and creating new business opportunities. This paper studies how ethical fashion and textile craft industries are pondering shifting old systems and practices for women related to craft and fashion. This paper includes both primary and secondary data reviews. Preliminary data was collected using a survey conducted to understand women's views on the topic and try to answer the purpose of this paper, which is how the craft and fashion industries impacted women's empowerment. The research findings revealed that women could find decent work, earn fair wages, and have safer working conditions by engaging in sustainable fashion production. These opportunities contribute to their economic independence, allowing them to support themselves and their families.

Keywords: Ethical Fashion, Women Empowerment, Job Opportunities, Confidence, Leadership.

Introduction

Women empowerment in the present day is a multifaceted and ongoing movement that aims not only to promote gender equality, but also enhance women's rights, and empower women in various aspects of life. Efforts are being made everywhere to ensure equal access to education for girls and women worldwide. Educating girls and women not only empowers them individually but also positively impacts their families, communities, and societies as a whole. Empowerment through education has been promoting economic opportunities for women is crucial for their empowerment. This includes initiatives such as equal pay for equal work, promoting entrepreneurship among women, providing access to financial resources, and eliminating gender-based discrimination in the workplace. An increase in women's representation in decision-making positions and political offices has become an essential aspect of women's empowerment. Promoting positive and diverse portrayals of women in the media and popular culture has played a vital role in challenging stereotypes and promoting women's empowerment. Increasing representation of women in leadership roles across various sectors has also created an impact. Women leaders in the top-level hierarchy of varied fields have started promoting gender equality in all spheres of life, challenging stereotypes, and fostering a culture of respect and inclusion.

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Status of Ethical Fashion

This problem was recognized by various organizations and some of its impacts have been mentioned in the CRISIS - POLLUTION CRISES BY RASHMILA MAITIAFRICA AMERICAS ASIA EUROPE OCEANIA MAY 21ST 2023. Even the United Nations has recognized various impacts of Fast Fashion and its Environmental Impact. Thus iterated the importance of ethical fashion and its impact on various aspects of sustainable development. While the UN does not have a specific definition or guidelines for ethical fashion, it emphasizes principles and goals that align with ethical practices in the fashion industry. UN emphasizes the importance of ethical fashion thus it encourages sustainable practices in fashion production, including reducing resource consumption, minimizing waste generation, adopting renewable energy sources, and promoting circular economy models. This involves considering the environmental impact of materials, manufacturing processes, and supply chain management. The UN promotes fair labour practices in the fashion industry, focusing on ensuring safe working conditions, fair wages, and the protection of workers' rights. This includes eliminating forced labour, child labour, and discrimination in all stages of production. In the arena of fashion, ethical fashion encompasses social responsibility, which involves promoting gender equality, supporting marginalized communities, and empowering workers throughout the supply chain. This includes providing fair trade opportunities, fostering inclusive employment practices, and respecting the rights of indigenous communities. We received the answer to many questions raised by them during the Covid pandemic. Present studies try to present immaculately the role of acceptance of ethical fashion in the overall empowerment of women globally.

Impact of sustainable fashion on Society through the lens of various previous pieces of literature published

A study conducted by Oduor, V. O. in the year 2012 focused on the women of the Maasai community in Kenya and inspected the impact of women's involvement in Ethical Business through ITCs Ethical Fashion Africa Initiative. The direct outcomes on the women were -improved standards of living, increase in their confidence levels, creation of employment, international exposure to the market for their products, medical benefits for the mother and their children, and improved health and incomes. In the year 2016, Matayo C.R. conducted a study in Kenya on strategies to empower women through sustainable product design. The research improved the income, increased the purchasing power, capacity building, and skill development of the respondents

Rajesh S.M. (2020) in his study emphasized the use of dye derived from the jackfruit tree which is found abundant in Kerela and the training of women with the sustainable and innovative dyeing technique helping them to increase their income level. According to Bhatore, V & Adil women empowerment is necessary to achieve the SDGs and women are great influencers and can make transformations in the world.

In the interest of empowering a sustainable society, L.W. Evelina conducted a study in Indonesia in the year 2023. In his study, he analyzed the activity of brand communication of Indonesia's sustainable fashion named "Sejauh Mata Memandang". 'Sejauh Mata Memandang' is an Ethnic local brand of Indonesia that supports an environment-friendly program with the principle of zero waste production. The result of the study showed that the brand communication of 'Sejauh Mata Memandang' educated the message to care for the environment which was executed through offline events collaborated with zero waste online community.

The potential of Sustainable fashion to transform the fashion industry:

Sustainability as a movement and a way of adapting fashion to it, does more to the well-being of the society than it takes. Thanks to fashion activists, fashion leaders, fashion influencers, their followers, and the fashion movements, the idea of sustainability is more than just a concept to the current society, it has taken the shape of multiple trends. The masses have understood the impact of ethical shopping through the aforementioned key players. Thus now we know what impact a trend has on society. Aside from that, the most significant impacts of sustainable fashion can be in the form of various ways. One of the most important aspects of sustainable fashion is its positive impact on the environment. The fashion industry has historically been associated with high levels of pollution, resource depletion, and waste generation. But sustainable fashion aims to minimize these negative impacts by using eco-friendly materials, reducing water usage, implementing efficient production processes, and promoting recycling and upcycling.

The hard fact today is that the majority of the apparel we wear were being made by women in developing countries, in unpleasant and cruel environments. However, with the onset of ethical practices, things have changed. Fair labour practices and ethical manufacturing conditions are emphasized in a sustainable fashion which is fostering openness across the supply chain, ensuring that people involved in the manufacturing process are treated properly, are receiving fair living wages, and are working in safe conditions. Sustainable fashion firms and many start-up brands frequently practice responsible material sourcing, promote local craftspeople and communities, and oppose exploitative practices or greenwashing campaigns. Sustainable fashion has fostered industry innovation. Designers and brands are experimenting with environmentally friendly and socially responsible materials and manufacturing practices. As a result, eco-friendly fabrics manufactured from recycled materials, organic fibres, and alternative materials such as bamboo or hemp have emerged. Furthermore, sustainable fashion promotes collaboration among various stakeholders such as fashion firms, NGOs, legislators, and consumers in a combined value chain. Sustainable fashion promotes the circular economy concept, in which resources are used more efficiently, items are developed for lifespan, and waste is minimized. This strategy promotes practices such as garment repair, reuse, and recycling. The industry may drastically minimize its environmental carbon footprint by prolonging the lifespan of apparel and lowering dependency on disposable fashion. Sustainable fashion has promoted the creation of creative business models such as clothing rental services, clothing exchanges, and second-hand markets or flea markets, which promote circularity and waste reduction. Sustainability comes naturally to women as seen throughout generations when mothers and grandmothers used to reuse old fabrics, naturally dye clothes, embroider, hand weave fabrics, and tailor them as per their requirements. Moreover, the culture of hand-me-downs and thrift stores was made popular by women themselves and it's returning back to today's society now. The list of reputed, diligent eco-friendly, and sustainable women-owned fashion businesses is increasing now, thanks to the sustainability movement, women are getting the power to start brands that cater to their values. Some women-owned businesses are Saheli, Zari Vintage, Purkal Stree Shakti, Earth Rhythm, Two days off, The Terra Tribe, and some new startups like let's_save_as, alma, ecoluxury, and many more.

An Influencer in Adapting Ethical Fashion

Influencers on social media related to ethical and sustainable fashion like Kathleen, Michele, Aditi, and many more are playing very significant roles in promoting and fostering acceptance of sustainable fashion. As individuals with a large following and influence over their audience, they have the power to educate and inspire people to make more conscious fashion choices.

Some Organizations working with the production of sustainable fashion through women:

- **SAHELI WOMEN**

It is an all-female artisan collective in the rural Rajasthan village of Bhikamkor, northern India. It was founded by Madhu Vaishnav in 2015, the atelier of Saheli, still serves as a healthy option for women's secure income in the village and their quest to revive traditional embroidery and dyeing techniques is commendable. They are known to work with small, slow-fashion brands only.

- **PURKAL STREE SHAKTI**

Based in the foothills of the Himalayas, Purkal Stree Shakti Samiti was founded in the year 2003 to empower underprivileged village women through the craft of applique, patchwork, hand embroidery, and hand quilting. After 17 years of its existence, the organization positively impacted the lives of 170+ women from more than 40 villages. Due to the disruption of operations because of the COVID-19 pandemic, most of the 170+ women had to be dismissed in March. The organization has been revived with the help of three young designers and entrepreneurs - Banee Batta, Aastha Giri, and Aiswarya Enolla Patri. With a modern approach and traditional handcraft, all three of the girls aspire to preserve the legacy and take it to new heights! The torchbearers are aspiring to be self-reliant and take the brand forward as a Social Enterprise. The immediate goal of the brand is to rebuild sales and re-employ as many women as possible.

- **ELLEN MACARTHUR FOUNDATION**

Founded in 2010, with the goal of speeding up the transition to a circular economy, the charity has established itself as a global thought leader, putting the circular economy on the radar of decision-makers in business, government, and academia. Ellen laid the groundwork in 2005 when she became the quickest solo sailor to sail around the world. Her 71-day solo adventure across the wilderness helped her realize the vulnerability of our planet's ecosystems. In favor of a circular economy, which aims to reuse materials, reduce waste, and restore natural systems, the foundation provides evidence-backed original research about the pros of a circular economy.

Conclusion

The future of sustainable fashion looks very promising these days as more consumers and industry players have been able to recognize the importance of reducing the environmental impact of the fashion industry. As a result Collaboration and partnerships between brands, designers, manufacturers, and consumers will become more common. The concepts of using old clothes used to be called 'second-hand' or 'hand-me-downs' and bounced back to societies. These ones are also termed as 'vintage' or 'pre-loved clothes'. Recycling by buying these used clothes is gaining popularity in many modern countries including the UK, especially with young people. Brands are looking forward to working together to share knowledge and resources, promote sustainable practices, and drive systemic change within the industry through engaging indigenous craft workers and artisans. Therefore Women's empowerment has become an integral part of the sustainable fashion movement. By supporting ethical and sustainable practices, consumers can contribute to creating a new fashion industry that respects and empowers women, promotes gender equality, and supports the well-being and progress of women across the globe. Also By supporting the initiatives, consumers can contribute to the social and economic development of women and their communities.

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